

# HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR NESTBOXES LATELY?

By Mark Moore

Is there sawdust in your hair? Do you have a splinter or two in your hands? If so, for many of us, this is a good indication that breeding season is just around the corner.

Wintertime is usually one of the best times for outdoor parrot breeders to inspect their flights, perches and nest boxes. The

and maintenance will be required to avoid potential hazards in the cages and nest boxes of your facility. The list of things that may need attention can be lengthy, and can include items such as perches that may need re-securing, wind or other seasonal protection that may need to be put up or taken down, and nest boxes that need to be thoroughly examined, cleaned, repaired and/or replaced, if we are to expect progeny in the upcoming season.

For myself, I use numerous different sizes and shapes of nesting boxes. I make most of them from plywood. As the keeper of many genera of parrots and other birds, the annual nest box maintenance inspection is crucial. Nests left un-inspected may be unsafe and cause breeding failures in the upcoming season.

Consider the following points during your inspection:

1. Is the nestbox securely fastened?
2. Is the wood showing any sign of weather rot?
3. Does the nestbox need to be sanitized? (The answer to this is always yes when dealing with Cockatiels and Quaker Parakeets!)
4. Is the internal ladder still in place and secure?
5. Have the birds chewed and caused extensive damage to the nest box, resulting in such hazards as exposed screws or staples? Or, are there now large



*Whether there is one or a hundred nest boxes to inspect, it is imperative to do so on a regular basis.*

weather takes its toll on cages and other materials in the birds' environment. Depending on where you live, your climate can have many different effects on outdoor facilities. Some of us battle large annual rainfalls, while others are concerned with extreme summer heat. Some people may have heavy rain, extreme heat and bitter cold in winter. No matter where you live, one thing is certain: continual inspection





*A colony of mice have completely inundated this nest box creating a sanitary nightmare.*



*Neglected nest boxes can yield zero offspring.*



*A Texas Rat Snake has set up housekeeping in this cockatoo nest box.*

holes in the bottom of the box allowing the nesting material to fall out? (Note that not all of the destructive chewing is done by the birds. Believe it or not, squirrels or other rodents can chew in from the outside, allowing the birds to escape their flights)

6. Is the inspection door still secure with working hinges and latches? Finding that the hinge has rusted fast when you go to inspect for eggs is not the best time.
7. What is the condition of the nesting material, and does it need to be replaced?
8. Is the inside of the nestbox dry or showing signs of saturation from rain?
9. Have any pest species set up house keeping in your nest box (spiders, snakes, mice, wasps, termites, ants, etc.)?
10. Did the birds use the nestbox the prior season? If the answer is no, there may be a need to replace this box for any number of reasons

I choose wintertime to inspect my nest boxes because in my area of the country, that is the time when most nesting sites are vacant. Also, in the wintertime, the nursery requires a lot less of my time and I can plan for more hours working outside or in the woodshop. I always try to have a few different nest box variations on hand in the event that one needs to be replaced suddenly. By routinely setting this time aside each year, I assure myself that the work will be done and the birds will have new, or at least safe and secure, nesting sites for the upcoming season.

In some cases, it may be important to match up the type of nestbox with the species of bird to which it is offered. For instance, a nest box designed for the Silvery Cheeked Hornbills will be different than one designed for, say, macaws, cockatoos, or amazons. Sometimes it is necessary to be creative, and to use your imagination to create a box that simulates natural nest cavities in one way or another. I have found this true with the Black Palm Cockatoos. Some species that are prolific and less difficult to breed, such as the cockatiels, Pyrrhura conures, and Rose-ringed parakeets, may adapt to standard nest box designs.

There are nest boxes available that are made of materials other than wood. Some are made of Plexiglas, plastic, or metal, but the same issues will still need to be considered. Too often we use these nest boxes because we feel they will result in less maintenance time, and that they are more durable, and therefore a time saver. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Maintaining these beliefs may facilitate undue neglect. As our other responsibilities con-



*The insulating lining of this metal nest box is being excavated by mice, making the styrofoam accessible for the birds to ingest.*

sume the majority of our time and we have this false sense of security, the nest box may be overlooked.

Hopefully some of the accompanying images will inspire those who haven't checked inside of their nest boxes in a while. Some of them may actually explain why the birds don't use them. Send in your nest box questions to be answered in the Question & Answer Forum of upcoming issues of the Watchbird. Happy Breeding! ■



*A large variety of different shaped boxes are kept in supply in the event that immediate replacement is required.*

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